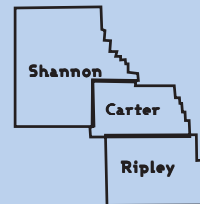




Conservation Currents



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
PROJECTS, ISSUES AND PROGRAMS IN SHANNON, CARTER AND RIPLEY COUNTIES

Current Conversations

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- ✓ MAINTAINING HEALTHY FOREST
- ✓ WALLEYE IN THE CURRENT RIVER
- ✓ EXPLORING OZARK CAVES
- ✓ USING CABLE RESTRAINS FOR TRAPPING
- ✓ CREATING SHRUB HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE
- ✓ GIGGING WORKSHOP FOR WOMEN

Kevin Patterson Protection District Supervisor

Being a native of Tennessee and growing up in a rural farm setting, I was exposed to the natural resources from a very early age. I was raised to respect the land for what it helped us produce in the way of corn, soybeans, wheat, sorghum and cotton. I also learned to love and respect the natural resources for what they were - the jewel and pride of the 'country folk'.

During my early years, I learned about wildlife conservation and that there were federal and state agencies which were immediately responsible for the protection and management of our forest, fish and wildlife resources. I also learned that Missouri was the envy of all other states due to their citizens' support and love of their wildlife resources.

As fate would have it, I moved to Missouri in 1978. I soon learned that the Missouri Department of Conservation was highly respected for its work in the restoration and management of the white-tailed deer and wild turkey. I have since learned that this Department is highly regarded by all other state conservation agencies as being the leader in conservation. I knew that I wanted to work for the Missouri Department of Conservation and be a part of this conservation leader's mission. In 1993, I was employed as a Conservation Agent with the Department's Protection Division.

In the summer of 1997, I was promoted and transferred to the Ozark Region of Missouri. Having been stationed in extreme northern Missouri and at Lake of the Ozarks for my entire employment tenure with the Department of Conservation, I was unaware of the magnitude of habitat diversity which was

to be found in the Missouri Ozarks. Once my family and I ventured out and experienced first-hand what the Missouri Ozarks actually encompassed, we were hooked!

The Missouri Department of Conservation includes nine divisions. These divisions work independently and together in the Department's mission of the protection and management of our state's wildlife resources. These divisions include Protection, Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife, Outreach and Education, Private Land Services, Resource Science, Administrative Services and Human Resources.

If you are a private landowner with an interest in managing your property's habitat for bobwhite quail, timber stand improvement, etc., or you are a citizen who would like to learn more about how you can play a role in Missouri's wildlife resource protection and management, there is a diversity of conservation professionals here to serve you.

The Missouri Department of Conservation is entrusted by the state's citizens to be immediately responsible for the protection and management of the forest, fish and wildlife resources but it takes everyone conscientiously working together to secure these resources for future generations to use and enjoy. If you are up to the task, I encourage you to give us a call. We will be glad to work with you in any area of conservation which interests you!



Kevin Patterson supervises conservation agents in Carter and Ripley counties.

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Forestry

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO OUR TREES?



"The problem has to do with the fluctuations in weather as we thought, as well as the water holding capabilities of our soils, and the age of the Ozark forest."

Clint Dalbom Forestry District Supervisor

Forestry Division's mission statement; To protect and manage the forest of the state for long term resource sustainability and for the use and enjoyment of the people; to contribute and work with all Divisions toward the Missouri Department of Conservation's Mission.

Many people are asking, "why are the trees in the forest dying?". When we look around at the Ozark's forest it is easy to see that, in fact, there are areas where many of the trees are dying. We first started seeing this in the early 1980's after the extreme drought of 1979 and 1980. Most forest professionals just thought it was the stress from that drought. We began treating it on state forest land by salvage harvesting outbreaks of dying trees. However, as this was done nearby trees would decline and then die. We studied the sites trying to discover what was causing the spread. In one area it looked as if the problem was a root fungus, the next looked like an insect may be the culprit and later the red oak borer.

Everyone could recognize what we all faced, but still no one could point their finger at the exact cause or name the dilemma, so the term oak decline was coined. Slowly, we came to realize that the oak decline and the insect and disease problems associated with it are part of a much larger problem. The problem has to do with the fluctuations in weather as we thought, as well as the water holding capabilities of our soils, and the age of the Ozark forest. Current tree species makeup of our forest and the present stocking levels or number of trees per acre



that are standing in our forest also play a part of the decline of the forests.

There is not much that we can do about the weather or the water holding capabilities of our thin Ozark soils. The insects and diseases that we now see have always been here to some degree. Fortunately, tree species composition and the age of our forests is something we can do something about. The majority of our forest trees in Shannon, Carter, and Ripley counties now are black and scarlet oaks. These have always been a component of the forest here and are some of our most valuable commercial trees that are important to the local economy. They are, however, short-lived trees reaching maturity at 100 years old or less.

White oak and pine, which are also part of our forests and can live for several hundred years, occur in lesser percentages now than they did historically. They have their own problems with insects and diseases, but are more drought tolerant and can live longer in areas of thin soils.

So you ask, "What are foresters doing to maintain a healthy forest in this part of the Ozarks?" My answer is that we are going to manage and restore our forests to a better mix of tree species. Not a different mix than we presently have, but to a mix that has a larger component of red oak, black oak, and scarlet oak on the moist east and north facing slopes, with shortleaf pine, white oak, and post oak on the dryer ridge tops and south and west facing slopes. We are also going to keep the tree numbers per acre low enough that Mother Nature can sustain the forest during periods of dry weather. This will create a forest that will be healthy and pleasing to look at with a diversity of tree species that future foresters will have options to manage the forest to try to avoid the problems that we now face.

Fisheries

WALLEYE RETURNING TO THE CURRENT RIVER



Dave Mayers Fisheries Management Biologist

The Missouri Department of Conservation hopes that some day the Current River will be the home of world-class walleye fishing. In the spring of 2003 the first step in improving walleye fishing in the Current River took place when MDC stocked just over 76,000 walleye in the Doniphan area. These three

month old walleye were hatched from eggs of brood fish collected from the Current River earlier that year. Department fisheries biologists and agents, along with several local anglers, used boats to spread these fish out upstream and downstream of Doniphan.

MDC's plan is to stock walleye for three years and evaluate how well they are doing. After the evaluation MDC will decide whether to

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continue, modify, or discontinue stocking. The Current River has a modest population of naturally reproducing walleye now, but MDC hopes to improve the numbers. Classic walleye habitat is abundant in the Current. Deep holes with lots of cover like boulders and rootwads are the preferred habitat of walleye. The stocked fish should do well there.

Walleye stocking in the Current River was last tried in the mid-1960's using small, newly hatched fish, less than one inch long. These stockings were not very successful due to low survival of the very small fish.

MDC has since improved walleye rearing techniques and can grow them to a larger size. Now, after hatching, walleye are placed in several rearing ponds at Chesapeake fish hatchery located west of Springfield. There they feed on microscopic organisms called plankton found in these ponds until they reach a size of 1 - 2 inches. Andy Cornforth, Hatchery Manager, says "Walleye have to be removed from the pond when they eat all the plankton or they will starve." If there is enough food in the pond the walleye can remain there until they reach 2 inches long. "That is the size when

they definitely have to be stocked so they can feed on larger food items not found in these ponds. If they remain in the hatchery ponds they will eat each other", Cornforth added.

When the hatchery ponds are drawn down, the walleye are netted out and transported to the river. "The day we harvest the pond is always a nervous time for us, for we never know exactly how many fish survived their 40 - 50 day stay there", Cornforth said. One year a pond yielded only 1,000 walleye, but two others had over 40,000 fish each. "Raising walleye is not an exact science, but we are learning more every year", he added.

This winter biologists hope to collect enough brood fish to stock both the Current and Black Rivers. The Black River below Clearwater Dam is under the same walleye stocking plan.

Anglers can expect to see these fish reach the legal size of 18 inches in about three years. The current state record for walleye is 21 lbs. 1 oz caught in Bull Shoals Lake in 1988.

"The Missouri Department of Conservation hopes that some day the Current River will be the home of world-class walleye fishing."



Wildlife

CAVES, THE LAST MISSOURI FRONTIER



Dan Drees
Wildlife Management
Biologist

I was small and skinny but I was not skinny enough. I was almost upside down. My chest was stuck between two slabs of bedrock, like a wood-

splitting wedge buried in a huge piece of green elm. My hands were straight out in front of me searching for something to push backwards on, but there was only black emptiness.

There is almost no place on the surface of Missouri that people have not explored, except for a few cliff ledges. However, just below the surface are caves that no one has entered in the entire history of the world. Dozens of these previously unexplored caves are discovered every year in Missouri. Sometimes these caves have no surface opening, and

are discovered by quarry operations, road construction, or the collapse of a previously plugged sinkhole.

More commonly, new caves are discovered by someone who detects a small hole in an outcropping of bedrock that has almost filled with rocks and soil. Sometimes just moving a few rocks and a little soil will open the entrance to a large cave. However, these openings that suggest an undiscovered cave is just past the constriction are usually too tight or they end quickly.

The best indicator that a large hidden cave is announcing its location is to see its breath. Yes, caves really do breathe. When high air pressure brings in clear weather, air is forced into caves. When low air pressure returns, air is drawn out of the cave. When this "exhaling" of the cave occurs on frigid winter days, the relatively warm and moist air of the cave looks like rising steam.

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"My hands were straight out in front of me searching for something to push backwards on, but there was only black emptiness."

Only caves with a large volume of air inside and relatively small openings have the ability to exhale these mist plumes. In winter, the freezing of the mist plumes will often adorn surrounding shrubs and trees with a spectacular glaze of ice crystals. If you discover this natural phenomenon you have most likely discovered a large cave. Whether the cave entrance will be large enough for human entry is another matter. You could get stuck like I was.

After my fellow cave explorers pulled me out by my feet, they each tried to squeeze into the newly discovered cave, only to be stopped even sooner by their larger body size. I peeled off my coveralls in the brisk January sunshine and took my second turn at the tight spot. The extra quarter inch of clearance made a huge difference. Exhale and scoot, exhale and scoot, exhale and wow!

Coming through the tight spot was like crawling over the lip of a huge bowl. Within ten feet of the surface I was soon standing on the side of a cave room bigger than most homes. As my coon-hunting light pierced the darkness I was in awe by the abundance, size, and beauty of the calcite deposits.

My vantage point also allowed me to look back up through the tiny entrance passage and find

a rock that would unlock the cave for my friends. Moving one softball-sized rock that was mired in the clay made the entrance passage just big enough for the other three cavers. Now we had the responsibility to explore, the half mile of cave while doing all that we could to protect its splendor, including putting the rock back in the entrance passage on our way out.

The Current River watershed has hundreds of recorded caves and a great abundance of land accessible to the public (The Dept. of Conservation, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Pioneer Forest, and The Nature Conservancy all provide public access to large acreages along the Current River). To be good land stewards it is necessary for land managers to know what resources they are working with, hence the need to locate, explore, inventory, and map caves.

People who visit lands accessible to the public are often the ones who discover and inform land managers of special resources. Sharing your discoveries with those of us that manage these lands is greatly appreciated. I would bet that if you are in the woods this winter and discover the magic of a freezing mist plume on public access land, the area manager would appreciate knowing about it.

"Only caves with a large volume of air inside and relatively small openings have the ability to exhale these mist plumes."



Protection

NEW TRAPPING DEVICES LEGAL

Ryan Houf and Scott Stephens
Conservation Agents

CABLE RESTRAINTS IN MISSOURI

After studying reports about the safe and efficient use of cable restraints (sometimes called "relaxing snares") to capture coyotes and foxes, the Missouri Department of Conservation adopted new regulations providing trappers the opportunity to use them for the first time this year. The MDC and the Missouri Trappers Association entered into a cooperative agreement to provide resident trappers in Missouri with training to learn the best methods for using cable restraints on land. When used properly, cable restraints can hold captured animals without mortalities and with few significant injuries. This allows a trapper to release non target animals alive and free of injury. As are all trapping methods, using cable restraints is a highly regulated activity.

Anyone who traps must follow strict rules established and enforced by the Missouri Department of Conservation. Specific regulations established just for cable restraints include the following:

- Only Missouri residents with a valid trapping permit are permitted to use cable restraints
- Trappers must be a holder of a cable restraint permit by successfully completing a certified cable restraint training course,
- Cable restraints must be made of non-stainless multi-strand cable not greater than 5' long(not including extensions) with a diameter of not less than 5/64"
- Be equipped with a commercially manufactured breakaway rated at 285lbs. or less
- Be equipped with a cable stop that prevents it from closing to less than 2 ½ in diameter
- Be equipped with an anchor swivel
- Be equipped with a relaxing-type lock
- NOT be equipped with a compression-type



"When used properly, cable restraints can hold captured animals without mortalities and with few significant injuries."

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"Ninety percent of the folks we contacted were in compliance with the gigging regulations."

choke spring or be otherwise mechanically powered

- Have a loop size of 12" diameter or smaller and the bottom of the loop must be set at least 6" or more above the ground

- Be solidly anchored or stabilized in a location where a captured animal cannot get entangled by rooted woody vegetation greater than 1/2" in diameter or any other object

- Be at least 12" from a fence when fully extended

- NOT be set using a drag or used with a kill pole

- Special season dates are December 15 to February 15

several individuals who decided to take game fish (Walleye, Chain Pickerel, Smallmouth Bass) by gig. There have also been some folks who took more than their share of legal hog suckers. Those fines resulted in well over one thousand dollars. Other violations included gigging without a fishing permit and littering.

Conservation Agents in Shannon, Carter, and Ripley Counties have been using the deer decoys a lot this past season. We are mainly looking for people shooting from a public roadway or vehicle and people spotlighting for deer.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

If there are any subjects you would like to see in the *Conservation Currents* please contact Scott Stephens or have any questions pertaining to the Wildlife Code please contact the Conservation Agent assigned to your county. County assignments and phone numbers are listed on the back cover of *Conservation Currents*.



ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

As stated in the fall issue of *Conservation Currents*, Conservation Agents will be concentrating their efforts on remote gigging areas. So far we have contacted a lot of people out enjoying the sport. Ninety percent of the folks we contacted were in compliance with the gigging regulations. There were

Private Lands

BRUSH DIVERSITY FOR WILDLIFE

Brad McKee
Private Land Conservationist



"The more shrub variety, the better wildlife."

Got a well-kept farm, but not as much wildlife as you would like? Could be you have very little edge habitat – that zone of shrubs, grasses, legumes and weeds between forests and pasture fields.

For wildlife habitat, you want a "soft" or gradual transition from crop field to woodland rather than an abrupt change from one to the other. A border of wild plum, indigo bush, hazelnuts or other shrubs can help. Plant five to seven rows of shrubs between the field and the woodland. Spacing depends on the mature size of the shrubs you choose. Typically, shrubs are planted 4' to 6' apart within the row and 8' apart between rows, to allow cultivation.

The more shrub variety, the better wildlife. That's because some types of shrubs offer nesting cover, some provide escape cover, and some give loafing cover. The mixture of shrubs also gives fruits that mature at different seasons and fruits that remain on the plants for different lengths of time. For both reasons, a mixture of shrubs will attract a more diverse group of wildlife. Shrubs commonly recom-

mended for borders include lespedezas, silky dogwood, American plum, blackberry, blackhaw viburnum, indigo bush, and crabapple. Prepare a clean seedbed and be prepared to cultivate the weeds between and beside each row for the first year, to eliminate competition for young shrubs.

You can improve the shrub border's value to wildlife by adding ten more feet of grasses or legumes on the crop side of the border. Native grasses like little bluestem and Indiangrass work well, as do a number of clovers. A mixture of partridge pea and Korean lespedeza will offer young quail and turkeys a prime bug area. Another option is to plant an annual game bird seed mix including milo, millet, soybeans or wheat. It's a built-in food plot near a wooded area that you can leave standing for two or three years. You could also disk the area and allow native weeds to regenerate naturally. Disking the area once every three years will help to spark new growth of weeds.

A variety trees and shrubs are available to order from the Missouri Department of Conservation that can help you spruce up your farm or backyard while making it more attractive to wildlife. From now through February to March Missouri landowners can order nursery stock items from MDC's George O. White Nursery at Licking, Mo. Order forms are available online at <http://www.mdc.mo.gov/> or feel free to contact me for assistance.



Education

MISSOURI OUTDOOR WOMEN TAKE A STAB AT GIGGING



Melanie Carden-Jensen Conservation Education Consultant

Although gigging is familiar to many Ozark residents, a group of women from around the state came to Shannon County to experience the longtime Ozark tradition of sucker gigging. Held at the Jerry J. Presley Conservation Education Center north of Eminence September 18-19, this group experienced the excitement of gigging their first sucker. Conservation Agents Dave Ingram (Dent County), Brad Hadley (Shannon County) and Jason Langston (Ripley County) assisted each participant by providing instruction in Missouri gigging regulations, how to identify fish when gigging, and how to use a gig. At last, the ladies (and one lone gentleman) were ready to hit the river. The newly trained giggers then went out on the Current River to try their hand. The Agents along with Jerry Austin, Outdoor Skills Specialist, took the women out and worked with them on an individual basis, helping them spot the fish and getting the boat in position to give the giggers the best chance at success. Most had at least some success.

If you are going to gig, you better know how to prepare the fish. Kelly Conway, MDC Presley Center employee, brought along her personal gigging box to share with the women. Each piece of her equipment had a story that went with it. The stories made clear the rich tradition and family values associated with gigging. After a demonstration, the women picked up their fillet knives and got to work. Under Mrs. Conway's watchful eye, each scored the fish gigged earlier.



Nothing ends a gigging experience like a traditional fish fry complete with hush puppies, fried potatoes and coleslaw. Staff at the Presley Center prepared the cole slaw and potatoes and the participants made another potato dish, cherry chocolate dump cake and blackberry cobbler in Dutch ovens. Going back to Mrs. Conway and her stories of the family fish fry, everybody brought something and contributed to the meal.

Gigging is a very popular method of harvesting fish in the Ozarks. Most giggers take their sport seriously and MDC personnel were willing to pass on the knowledge to continue this great Ozarks tradition.

Coordinated by Regina Knauer, Outdoor Skills Specialist, the Missouri Department of Conservation supports a series of Missouri Outdoor Women event throughout the state to engage women in outdoor activities they may not otherwise have opportunity or means to experience. Anyone female who has had their husband try to teach them to do anything understands why it might be a good idea to get some instruction from another individual.



Do you have an outdoor skill you'd like to try but don't really have someone to teach you? Contact Jerry Austin, Outdoor Skills Specialist for the Ozark Region at 417-256-7161 ext 230 to find out more on the Missouri Outdoor Women.

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Quail and Grassland Bird Leadership Council Takes Flight

The Quail and Grassland Bird Leadership Council believes that Missourians should be as aware of conservation issues in their own backyard as they are of rainforest issues in South America.

Bobwhite quail and many of Missouri's grassland songbirds rely on private landowners to provide their proper seasonal habitat needs, and right now their populations need help. The Council was recently formed to ensure that Missourians understand the critical habitat needs of quail and grassland birds, and to spur action among both the public and wildlife agencies that directly leads to "on-the-ground" habitat management. The Council members are private citizens with close ties to conservation and agriculture, as well as conservation organizations such as Quail

News Bites and Tid Bits

Unlimited, the Missouri Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, The Conservation Federation of Missouri, Audubon Missouri and the Missouri Prairie Foundation.

Council leaders, in cooperation with the Conservation Department, are helping to chart a course in Missouri to restore quail and grassland songbird numbers, and to educate the public about conservation of these species and the importance of habitat enhancement. Birdwatchers, native plant enthusiasts and upland bird hunters all benefit from enhanced grassland habitat.

A **Conservation Forum** will be held at Eminence High School on December 9th. from 7 - p.m. to 10 p.m. Purpose of this public event is to seek input about management of Department lands and programs. All are invited.

Learning Takes Flight in Birch Tree Outdoor Classroom

Melanie Carden-Jensen

Conservation Education Consultant

Ms. Mara Pace and Mr. Robby Bennett at Birch Tree Elementary School have both used butterflies to teach their 4th graders in the past but didn't really have a place to take their lessons outside. On September 10th, 2004 that changed. They now have a butterfly garden in the area between the two buildings to help students in their studies of life cycles, ecology, statistics, migration and geography to name just a few.

Conservation Agent Brad Hadley, Education Consultant Melanie Carden-Jessen along with Mrs. Diane Hadley did the initial work in the garden and dug the sod up to make it easier for the students. Later in the day, Ms. Pace, Mr. Bennett and their students joined in to help prepare the bed. The students helped lay the timbers (and learn a bit of algebra in the process), picked rocks, and did the planting. Plants and timbers were donated by the Missouri Department of Conservation. Hamilton Seed provided a few extra plants to help fill in the garden.

At first, Ms. Pace was concerned about the amount of time a butterfly garden would take to maintain. Because all the plants used in the garden are native plants, the garden will require little care, only watering to help get the root system established. Once established, the plants should require water only in severe drought and should not be fertilized. Fertilizing makes the garden more attractive to aggressive, non-native species and is not needed for plants adapted to the climate and soil conditions of the Ozarks. The garden will provide lots of learn-

ing opportunities with little upkeep for years to come.

If you are interested in learning more about outdoor classrooms and the Show-Me Outdoors Missouri grants for outdoor classrooms or the Grow Native program, contact the conservation education consultant for your county. In Shannon County contact Melanie Carden-Jessen @ 417-255-9561 ext 236. In Carter or Ripley County, contact Bridget Jackson @ 573-840-9788.



Ms. Pace's and Mr. Bennett's class show off their newly constructed butterfly garden at Birch Tree Elementary School.



Outdoor Calendar

Hunting

Groundhog
Coyote
Squirrel
Rabbit
Deer/Turkey Archery

Opens

5/10/04
5/10/04
5/22/04
10/01/04
9/15/04
11/24/04

Closes

12/15/04
3/31/05
2/15/05
2/15/05
11/12/04
1/15/05

Deer Muzzleloader
Deer Antlerless Firearms

11/26/04
12/11/04

12/05/04
12/19/04

Fishing

Black Bass (impoundments)
Black Bass (streams, Current Jacks Fork and their tributaries)
Trout Management Areas
Trout Parks
Gigging Nongame Fish (streams)

Opens

Open All Year
5/22/04
Open All Year
3/1/04
9/15/04

Closes

2/28/05

10/31/04
1/31/05

Resident Hunting Permit Prices

Hunting and Fishing --- \$19
Small Game --- \$10
Fall Firearms Turkey ---\$13
Youth Deer and Turkey ---\$17
Archery Hunting ---\$19
Firearms Any Deer ---\$17
Firearms First Bonus Deer --- \$7
Firearms Second Bonus Deer --- \$7
Trapping --- \$10

Resident Fishing Permit Prices

Hunting and Fishing --- \$19
Fishing --- \$12
Trout --- \$7



We're on the Web!
WWW.CONSERVATION.STATE.MO.US



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

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MDC Mission

- ✓ To protect and manage the fish, forest, and wildlife resources of the state,
- ✓ To serve the public and facilitate their participation in resource management activities,
- ✓ To provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy, and learn about fish, forest, and wildlife resources.

Mission of This Newsletter

The mission of this newsletter is to share current information about conservation projects, issues, and programs and to develop working relationships with the citizens of Shannon, Carter, and Ripley Counties.

Share Your Thoughts

If there are any subjects you would like to see in the *Conservation Currents* please contact Scott Stephens or have any questions pertaining to the Wildlife Code please contact the Conservation Agent assigned to your county. County assignments and phone numbers are listed below.

Operation Game Thief and Operation Forest Arson

Sponsored by the Conservation Federation of Missouri, the Missouri Dept. of Conservation and the U.S. Forest Service

Phone: 1-800-392-1111

CONTACT OFFICES AND NAMES

If you have a question about any of the following topics, here are your contact professionals:

Shannon Co. Field Office
573/226-3616



Forestry

Gary Gognat 573/226-3616
Bryan Hirt 573/226-3616
Dennis Hutchison 573/226-3616

Private Land Management:

Lesly Holt 417/967-2028

Conservation Agents:

Brad Hadley 573/292-8540
Scott Stephens 573/226-3089

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Dan Drees 573/226-3616
Rhonda Rimer 417/256-7161

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Dave Mayers 417/256-7161

Conservation Education

Melanie Carden-Jensen 417/256-7161

Outdoor Skills

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Carter Co. Field Office
573/323-8515



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Ripley Co. Field Office
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